DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 024 CG 009 836

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TITLE Organizational Considerations for Effective Residential Learning Implementation.
PUB DATE 6 Mar 75
NOTE 16p.; Presented at the Annual Convention of the American College Personnel Association (50th, Atlanta, Georgia, March 5-8, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS College Students; Concept Formation; *Higher Education; *Learning Experience; *Organizational Effectiveness; *Residential Programs; Speeches; State of the Art Reviews; *Student Development

ABSTRACT

The evolving concept of student development in higher education is conceived of in many ways. The administrative implementation of the concept is not as readily conceived. One method of implementation concerns the comprehensive concept of residential learning, regardless of institutional size or type. Six organizational problems for the implementation of this integrated concept must be overcome. Five organizational skills can be used which provide for successful implementation by viewing the concept, not only in terms of the benefits that accrue to students, but also as solving the additional problems that may be caused for institutional colleagues through the implementation of the student development concept. (Author)

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ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE RESIDENTIAL LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION

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Presented to the

AMERICAN COLLEGE PERSONNEL ASSOCIATION

Program - Residential Learning: An Organizational Facilitation of Student Development

Hyatt Regency Hotel
Atlanta, Georgia

March 6, 1975

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ABSTRACT

The evolving concept of student development in higher education is conceived of in many ways. The administrative implementation of the concept is not as readily conceived. One method of implementation concerns the comprehensive concept of residential learning, regardless of institutional size or type. Six organizational problems for the implementation of this intergrated concept must be overcome. Five organizational skills can be used which provide for successful implementation by viewing the concept, not only in terms of the benefits that accrue to students, but also as solving the additional problems that may be caused for institutional colleagues through the implementation of the student development concept.

Organizational Considerations for Effective Residential Learning Implementation

Since the emphasis of this program is not to explore the residential learning concept, but rather to discuss and establish organizational objectives and techniques for the implementation of student development through a residentail learning structure, I shall review briefly some of the objectives that generally provide a base for residential learning.

Residence halls have been recognized as potential centers for erhancing the educational, social, and cultural experiences of students, usually through out-of-class experiences. This artificial split between curriculum and extra-curriculum is now being questioned by our profession. The general goal for residential learning, and I submit, for the now evolving concept of student development has been that learning does not occur only in the classroom ---- that it is a continuous process which occurs, if advantage can be taken of the opportunities that exist or those that can be created.

The types of residential learning structures that have been created are quite varied, extending from offering one or two courses in a hall to the creation of independent colleges. What I am saying at this point is that there are enough well articulated objectives in existence; there are enough models around; and there is research to support the concept of residential learning, of integrated living-learning experiences, and of the general concept of student development. What does not exist as plentifully are the administrative and organizational techniques needed to implement these concepts on a continuing basis.

What is needed is a long term commitment to the concept, which will be supported by your institution through the organization you develop and the administrative techniques that will work on your campus. What we are saying here is that if you do support the residential learning concept in theory as a mechanism to bridge the gap between curriculum and extracurriculum, faculty and students, student failure and student development, there are ways to implement residential learning, no matter what type or size your institution and no matter what your organizational position.

With that commitment in mind it is important that we not gild the lilly. As Golda Meir stated in assessing Israel's situation in the Middle East, "It has taken us 4000 years to realize that Moses moved us into the wrong neighborhood." Before entering the "wrong neighborhood" it is important to assess the situation analytically to discover the skills and resources required and the consequences of any such move to overcome the implementation problems in the unique bureaucracy of higher education. I believe that the organizational and administrative problems of implementing residential learning lie in the following six areas.

1) First, the <u>articulation of appropriate residential learning/student development goals</u> is a difficult process, especially since we are attempting to influence human behavior. There is a constant organizational strain in moving to academic goals in a residential setting and now in moving to the more comprehensive concept of student development. There is an internal tendency to overemphasize academic goals when initiating a residential learning structure and then a reaction which leads to overemphasis on human development

goals to the neglect of academic legitimacy. This strain is also evident in the potential conflict between the subsystem goals of residential learning and the goals for the entire institution. While the obvious goals may be compatible, an appropriate analysis may indicate that at the operational level significant goal conflict may exist.

2) A second problem exists in the organizational and administrative structure that is created to carry out these goals, especially if the potential conflicts go undetected, or worse, detected but unresolved. While personnel at the operational level are creating a residential learning structure "to enhance student development," that same objective may mean nothing but additional problems for those higher in the bureaucracy. It is essential, then, that residential learning problems be organized, administered, and justified to meet certain needs, just as other programs meet other needs -- as an integral part of the institutional structure, rather than conceiving of it as an ad hoc extraorganizational subsystem created to meet needs that those in the central organization have failed to meet.

3) Even if the residential learning structure is organized as a legitimate subsystem at the institution, a third problem area concerns the competitive environment that exists with other institutional subsystems for resources, personnel, recognition, and power. This competition often erodes the initial institutional support given at the policy level to residential learning, if that support is not actively and continuously cultivated. If the proper foundation in structure and goals has been laid, however, and administrative techniques developed, attacks from competitors will be less effective and support in budget, personnel, facilities, and institutional influence can be accrued toward

overcoming competition and enhancing the requisite cooperative efforts needed with those subsystems.

4) A fourth important element in organizational effectiveness is the commitment to evaluation and to change in response to the results of that evaluation, as evidenced by institutional moral and resources support. The evaluation must be in relation to the goals established at your institution and in response to the organizational support and restrictions under which you are operating currently, rather than factors that operate at other institutions. Change must be implemented as readily as the original goals, which requires either an extraordinary amount of professional objectivity or assistance from sources external to the subsystem. Goals must be pursued in a flexible and rational manner. Often innovative programs, created to overcome institutional tradition and rigidity, may become victims themselves of the fervor and rigidity of experimentation, rather than becoming the conduit for rational change.

5) The fifth and one of the more difficult problems to overcome in the implementation of this amalgamation with the academic subsystem is the traditional faculty role. Regardless of the organizational structure of the residential learning concept or the administrative accommodation with the academic policies and procedures, success will be dependent on the effective recruitment, support, and rewards of the participating faculty. Faculty, not just graduate assistants or ad hoc faculty, but full time faculty, must be an integral part of an effective and academically legitimate program. Faculty will be effective if their professional needs can be fulfilled partially through participation in the program; if knowledge, rather than popularly accepted myths, about faculty behavior is used in organizing efforts; and if faculty have a personal and professional stake in

the success of the residential learning structure, as reflected in both the formal and informal rewards system.

6) The final organizational problem area concerns the attitudes and actions of the consumer -- the student. Students' power as consumers in my opinion is just now beginning to be realized. Any administrative or organizational plan, no matter how well conceived has not been properly implemented unless an efficient number of students can be attracted to the program, particularly in the long term. Several questions must be raised concerning consumer acceptance and administrative response to their needs and desires. How are students' desires reflected in the stated objectives of the program and the administrative style employed in your role as an educator? What techniques will develop leadership among students which will encourage their participation and development? What leadership role will you take to promote or even to sell this program among students on a long term basis? Finally, what do you do if students reject the concept, but you are convinced of its value? In sum, how do you handle the inevitable strains between organizational goals, your desires, and student's needs? I believe that this question is the essential problem for all student development personnel in higher education today.

The essence of the presentations to follow here will give you insight into how these six problems have been dealt with at three differing types of institutions. I recommend that an effective conceptualization for those presentations is to enhance your positive view of residential learning and to take you to the concept as viewed by the "other guy" at your institution --- not as a grand philosophy of student development, but as a problem that your residential learning program may be creating for him. In this way you can plan ways to

anticipate and elicit his support and then develop specific tactics to overcome his objections and "convince" him of the viability of the residential learning concept for him, or at least, ways it can help him solve his problems.

Implementation requires the general ability to obtain the most resources from your institution which can contribute to the development of college students. This ability requires several specific skills:

1) The most essential and most overlooked skill is that of organizational analysis, which should provide the base for all other organizing efforts. We tend to jump on the bandwagon before we analyze whether the trip may be heading to Golda Meir's "wrong neighborhood."

2) The establishment of institutional continuity is a crucial skill for student development advocates, especailly considering the traditional isolation from the academic subsystem. This tradition must be overcome in order to develop the skills and insights to elicit needed support from faculty, as based on an analysis of their needs and rewards.

3) Planning and the effective dissemination of the plan is an essential skill needed to avoid the "wrong neighborhood," as well as the ability to judge the significant financial, bureaucratic, personal and political consequences of action.

4) Bureaucratic skills must be developed to accomplish established objectives by eliciting from the structure those elements that can assist in finding ways to work the system for the benefit of students.

5) Counseling skills, which most of us have developed, should be applied not only with students, but also in consulting with colleagues and potential contributors to your residential learning structure. Assisting them with their problems' solutions also may lead to the solution of your implementation problems. Generally, while the range of skills must be expanded, we sometimes do not take advantage of applying the skills we already possess in new and different ways.

In closing, these skills represent several techniques, which are essential for the implementation of residential learning, by those very student personnel staff members who are not trained, nor have considered themselves to be administrators. What is needed is to develop the organizational skills which are needed in psychology, politics, and poker. Most of us have the background in psychology, human development, and counseling. The essence of this session today is to begin to assist in enhancing or developing the skills of politics and poker for use at your own campuses in the establishment of the student development concept through the organizational mechanism of residential learning.

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Survey Activities for

ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS AND

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

for

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at

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Presented by

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RESIDENTIAL LEARNING GOALS

1) Student Development Advantages -

2) Institutional Advantages -

3) Residential Learning Goal (s) for Student Development at:

4) NOTES

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ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

1) Structural Aspects:

ASSETS -

LIABILITIES -

2) Personnel Aspects:

ASSETS -

LIABILITIES -

3) NOTES

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IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1) Strategy Style -

2) Goal -

3) Strategy Objectives -

A)

B)

C)

4) Alternative Tactics

	ACTION	SKILL	WHO/ WHAT	WHEN	CONSEQUENCES
A) 1.					
2.					
3.					
B) 1.					
2.					
3.					
C) 1.					
2.					
3.					